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216

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COPY NO. 22

W.M. (40) 35th CONCLUSIONS, MINUTE 1.

Confidential Annex.

(7th February, 1940.)

SUPREME WAR
OUNCIL:
th MEETING.

ssistance
o Finland.

Previous
reference:
M.(40)26th
nclusions,
inute 7.)

THE PRIME MINISTER said that M. Daladier had expounded the French project for a landing at Petsamo, but he had hinted that the idea had originated with the Finns and was clearly not in any way anxious to press the scheme. M. Daladier, however, had emphasised that if we turned down the Petsamo project, we must do something to help the Finns. It was obvious that considerations of internal politics had a good deal to do with M. Daladier's attitude. He had been Prime Minister in France for much longer than the usual term of office of French Premiers, and this factor, combined with the general lack of active operations, had given rise to political intrigues in France on the part of persons who would like to see a change of Prime Minister. M. Daladier was therefore very ready to welcome our proposals for active intervention in Scandinavia.

The Prime Minister said that he had explained the British proposals for the despatch of 3 divisions to Scandinavia in order to give assistance to the Finns in the Spring, before the break-up of the ice in the Baltic opened the way for a possible German expedition. He had emphasised that the administrative difficulties of such an enterprise would be considerable. Special clothing had to be provided for winter conditions, but later on different clothing and equipment would be needed, after the thaw came. Shipping and maintenance would present considerable problems, and there was much work to be done by the Staffs if the expedition was to be ready in time. We had to prepare not

only to assist Finland, but also to support Sweden in case of a German attack resulting from our action. The general sequence which we proposed was:-

- (i) We should make full preparations for the despatch of the expedition.
- (ii) It would be arranged that Finland should issue an appeal to the world for assistance against Russia, addressing herself in particular to Norway and Sweden, who were her nearest neighbours and would be the next to be overrun by Russia.
- (iii) We should then immediately approach the Scandinavian countries and say that we were ready to answer Finland's appeal, but we required free passage for our troops through their countries. In these circumstances, it would be very hard for Norway and Sweden to refuse. The world would cry shame upon them if, owing to their intransigence, Finland were overrun.
- (iv) Our forces would land at Narvik and Trondheim and move up to Finland through Boden. In doing so, they would automatically secure possession of the Galivare ore fields.

M. Daladier had expressed his entire agreement with these proposals, but had pointed out that if Norway and Sweden refused to give us free passage, it would be ridiculous for us to be held up at the very last moment after making all these preparations. In these circumstances, we might have to do something at Petsamo. The Prime Minister said he had expressed the view that a refusal by Norway and Sweden would be most unlikely in the circumstances, though he had agreed that if they went so far as to use force against us, they could stop our getting through by cutting the railways. M. Daladier had seemed satisfied on this point, but had asked that the Chiefs of Staff should nevertheless examine fully the Petsamo project, lest in the worst case we might have to fall back upon it.

The importance of the time factor had been emphasised in the discussions. The 20th March was the critical date by which our first echelon would have to be ready to arrive in Scandinavia if we were to be sure of forestalling the Germans. All preparations would therefore have to be pressed on with the utmost despatch. The French were prepared to contribute a brigade of Chasseurs Alpins, a brigade of the Foreign Legion and possibly 4 battalions of Poles.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY pointed out that, although the expedition should be under British control, it was essential, for political reasons, that the French should be represented in some strength in the forces. The first echelon should certainly include a French contingent.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that it was most important that nothing should prejudice the success of our approach to Norway and Sweden. The Germans, suspecting our intentions, might possibly offer mediation to the Finnish Government, and if this were accepted, we should be placed in a serious difficulty. He suggested therefore that we should give the Finns immediately an indication that we were prepared to come to their assistance with substantial forces, and thereby give them a chance of beating the Russians rather than of having to accept unfavourable terms of peace.

In the discussion which ensued the following points were made:-

- (i) Secrecy in our preparations was essential, if the Finnish appeal was to have its full effect.
- (ii) The Finnish Government had been toying with the idea of negotiating peace terms with Russia, and it would be better to make any approach on the lines suggested by the Foreign Secretary to Field-Marshal Mannerheim himself. Brigadier Ling was returning to Finland very shortly, and could be used as an emissary for this purpose.

(iii) The issue of the Finnish appeal would require careful timing. Our first echelon must be ready to move immediately the call came. There might be some slight delay while the Scandinavian countries argued with us, but when we demanded the right of passage we must be in a position to say to them that our troops were ready to sail at once not only to assist Finland, but also to support them against Germany if necessary.

Some discussion then took place on the details of the preparations to be made.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR said that the War Office had already received most of the authorities they required, but consultations would have to take place with the Treasury on various questions, and with the Dominions Office in regard to Newfoundland loggers. He urged that no time should be wasted in these inter-departmental discussions.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER undertook that there would be no delay whatsoever on the part of the Treasury.

THE PRIME MINISTER, in reply to a question, said that no decision had been reached as to whether troops sent to Scandinavia would go in the guise of "volunteers" on the Spanish "non-intervention" model. Russia was not yet officially at war with Finland, and we naturally desired to avoid open hostilities with Russia if it were in any way possible. He fully realised, however, that there were great practical difficulties in despatching British forces in formed bodies which were not legally part of the Armed Forces of the Crown.

The War Cabinet:-

(i) Took note:-

- (a) That their Conclusions as set out in W.M. (40) 31st Conclusions, Minute 1 (i) to (viii), regarding assistance to Finland and intervention in Scandinavia, had been accepted by the French, subject to the proviso that the project for a landing at Petsamo should be further examined by the Allied Staffs in case the Scandinavian countries refused to give passage to our forces and we were thus compelled to adopt other methods of assisting Finland.
- (b) That the French had agreed to the control of operations in Scandinavia being in British hands, but would provide a contingent of French troops.

- (ii) Authorised the Service Departments, and other Departments concerned, to carry out immediately the measures detailed in paragraph 24 of W.P. (40) 35, with a view to being ready for military intervention in Scandinavia by the 20th March, 1940, subject to such modifications and additions as might be necessitated by direct intervention in Finland.
- (iii) Invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for War, in consultation, to arrange for an indication of our intentions to be conveyed to Field Marshal Mannerheim by Brigadier Ling, who was shortly leaving for Finland.
- (iv) Authorised the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to inform Dominion Prime Ministers of the above Conclusions.

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Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.

MOST SECRET.COPY NO.

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W.M. (40) 55th CONCLUSIONS. MINUTE 7.Confidential Annex.

(7th February, 1940).

ITALY.

Probable intentions.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 50th Conclusions, Minute 5).

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS gave the War Cabinet the following particulars which must be regarded as highly secret, which Sir Percy Loraine had obtained from a reliable and well informed source in Rome (Sir Percy Loraine's Telegram No. 25 Saving):-

The Italian Government had decided to move two Army Corps to the Brenner, and in addition the whole of the Italian Cavalry was standing by for employment in Hungary if required.

Signor Mussolini was infuriated with the behaviour of the German Government in regard to the Alte Adige and was accusing them of flagrant disloyalty. He was however still unfriendly to us.

Marshal Badoglio had advised Signor Mussolini against relying too much upon the invincibility of the German Army and had expressed the view that the French General Staff was the best in Europe. When Signor Mussolini had said that he would like to have another opinion on this question, Marshal Badoglio had suggested that he should consult Marshal Caviglia. This was a noteworthy suggestion, for ever since the Italian defeat at Caporetto there had been no love lost between the two Marshals. Signor Mussolini had subsequently consulted Marshal Caviglia, who had confirmed the views expressed by Marshal Badoglio.

In submitting this report Sir Percy Loraine had asked that it might be treated as exceptionally secret, since, if it became known in Rome, it was so circumstantial in character, that the Italians would have little difficulty in tracing its source.

The War Cabinet took note of the statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

MOST SECRET.

COPY NO. 3

W.M. (40) 55TH CONCLUSIONS. MINUTE 8.

Confidential Annex.

(7th February, 1940).

U.S.S.R.

Visit of
Sir Stafford
Cripps to
Moscow.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that the previous evening Sir Alexander Cadogan had received a most secret telegram from His Majesty's Ambassador, Chungking, which might be summarised as follows:-

After a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador to China, Sir Stafford Cripps had decided to go to Moscow by air. Sir Stafford Cripps had gathered that the Government of the U.S.S.R. were now feeling apprehensive regarding their connection with Germany, and were looking for a way out. He (Sir Stafford Cripps) thought therefore that a visit by himself to Moscow might be useful. The Soviet Government were sending an aircraft to Urumtschi on the Mongolian frontier on the 9th February, 1940, to fly him to Moscow, and he expected to be back at Urumtschi by the 11th February. Between the 14th and 20th February he would be in the province of Sinkiang and would return to Chungking on the 23rd February when he expected to be in a position to submit a report for transmission to him (the Secretary of State). Sir Archibald Clerk Kerr had asked him while in Sinkiang to do his best to find out the true position in that province.

It was clearly not possible for us to stop Sir Stafford Cripps from going to Moscow, although his visit might give rise to misunderstanding.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.